



[Moses Kotane, 1905 - 1978](#)

Moses Kotane

The African National Congress of South Africa is sometimes called “Africa’s Oldest Liberation Movement”. In this limited series we are not attempting a comprehensive sampling of the abundant South African revolutionary writing. But in this part we will look at four South African revolutionary writers, together.

Starting with Moses Kotane, we go on to Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo and “Comrade Mzala” (Jabulani Nxumalo). The first is a letter, the next is a book chapter, the third a radio broadcast script, or transcript, and the fourth is an article for the ANC publication “Sechaba”.

It is a mistake to think that Kotane’s famous “Cradock Letter” (attached; download linked below) was the origin of the Africanisation of the Communist Party of South Africa.

The well-known Black Republic Thesis, imposed on the South African Party by the Comintern, was far earlier in time (1927-1928). From soon after its founding in 1921 the CPSA had been a majority-black Party, though this was not always reflected in the top leadership, and especially not in the beginning.

But Kotane's plain and direct 1934 letter does perhaps mark a real turning point, because of the impact that it had; because of the consequences. Kotane became General Secretary of the Party (CPSA) in 1939, and then of the SACP after the banning of the CPSA, and remained in that office until his death in 1978. He was also Treasurer-General of the ANC for several years.

Kotane worked hard to make the Alliance between the Party and the ANC a solid and permanent one. His name is historically associated with the Party's approach to the National Question, which has been so influential in South African history up to the present time.

Here is Kotane's even shorter summary of his short letter from Cradock:

"My first suggestion is that the Party become more Africanised or Afrikanised, that the CPSA must pay special attention to S Africa, study the conditions in this country and concretise the demands of the toiling masses from first hand information, that we must speak the language of the Native masses and must know their demands. That while it must not lose its international allegiance, the

Party must be Bolshevised, become South African not only theoretically, but in reality, it should be a Party working in the interests and for the toiling people in S Africa and not a party of a group of Europeans who are merely interested in European affairs.”

The book from which this text was taken (“South African Communists Speak”, 1981) gives the following note below the “Cradock Letter”:

“The Independent African National Congress (Cape) had been formed in 1931 by Elliot Tonjeni and other left-wing members who had been driven out of the Cape ANC by the dictatorial action of the chairman ‘Professor’ Thaele. Tonjeni had been banished to the Eastern Cape by Justice Minister Pirow, and the Independent ANC drew most of its support from country branches in the region.”

Taken all together, the four pieces of writing in this part should provide a good outline of South African revolutionary history, and a good sampling of the South African revolutionary writing style.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Moses Kotane, ‘Cradock Letter’ to Johannesburg District Committee, 1934.](#)
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